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Discursive Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasised Femininity in the Textbooks of Primary Education: Children's Discursive Agency and Polysemy of the Narratives.

Gender-normative discursive representations in textbooks could have deleterious impacts on pupils' gender identity development. This study sets out to explore the discursive construction of femininity and masculinity in anthology textbooks for primary education and scrutinize children's sense-making of gender-normative discourses. Grounded in a poststructuralist theorization of gender and Connell's (1995) theory of masculinities, this qualitative study employs a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) to explore the discursive positioning of femininity and masculinity in school manuals. Additionally, semi-structured group interviews were conducted in two Athenian elementary schools with 40 boys and 40 girls, aged 8 to 10 years old. The findings revealed that, in addition to androcentrism, textbooks were overwhelmingly defined by emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity discourses. Analyses of pupils' accounts demonstrated that the children negotiated normative discourses in idiosyncratic ways, and that boys were less prepared than girls to subvert the gender-normative discourses promoted by textbooks. It was also found that the mother's employment status may exert a broadening influence on pupils' understanding of gender.

Keywords: Gender, hegemony, agency, textbooks, masculinity.

Introduction

In the early 1960s, second-wave feminists asserted that the educational system represented a 'propagative mechanism' of social inequalities, in that pedagogical practices were inextricably entwined with patriarchy. This hypothesis fuelled a dynamic, feminism-oriented educational research agenda. The primary focus of this research was gender representations in textbooks, as textbooks are the crucial elements of official educational content and strategies, and underlie most classroom activities (Brugeilles and Cromer 2009). Moreover, schoolbooks '...shape us by reflecting the politics and values of our society' (Fox 1993, 656) and provide young readers with culturally idealized representations of gender-appropriate

roles (Tsao 2008), predisposing them to accept traditional gender relations (McCabe et al. 2011). Feminist researchers contended that gender-normative representations in textbooks could have egregious effects on children's understanding of gender, future career aspirations (Kostas 2014, 2018), and self-assurance (Mukundan and Nimehchisalem 2008).

A shared characteristic among most research on gender representations in school manuals, in Hellas as well as internationally, is that it is focused almost entirely on reading schemes and is theoretically harnessed to social learning approaches to gender. Through this theoretical prism, the influence of gender-normative portrayals on pupils' perceptions of gender was presumed, as readers were viewed as docile recipients of pre-determined meanings. This qualitative study, however, is situated within a poststructuralist paradigm and draws on Butler's (1990) theorization of gender and Connell's (1995) theory of masculinities. Through the poststructuralist lens of subjectivity, children have varying degrees of agency and are positioned within discourses in idiosyncratic ways (Kostas 2018).

Using this theoretical foundation, this study set out to scrutinize the discursive construction of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity in anthology education textbooks for third and fourth graders in Hellas which have not received scholarly attention since a major revision in the mid-2000s. This study will also evaluate whether official government policy makers have taken into consideration gender-equality issues in these revised anthologies. Moreover, since texts are 'polysemous sites' (Lemish 1998, 148) and pupils actively participate in the production of meanings (Currie 1999), the analysis of the textbooks alone would lack insight into the potential influence of gender representations on shaping young readers' subjectivity. As such, this study will also analyse how pupils negotiate gender-normative discourses. Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to the wider debate about the influence of gender-normative discourses on children's perceptions of

gender, and offer suggestions for future directions in school textbook revisions both in Hellas and internationally.

Gender Representations in Textbooks and Children's Literature

Previous studies on textbooks and children's literature have scrutinized quantitative (i.e. distribution of female to male characters/protagonists) and qualitative (i.e., gender roles in the family and labour market) aspects of gender asymmetry. Per the quantitative gender disparity in narratives and iconography, a plethora of studies going as far back as the 1960s have reaffirmed that female characters are underrepresented (Gooden and Gooden 2001). Although the androcentrism that characterized textbooks published in the 1980s has decreased over time (Purcell and Stewart 1990) as the awareness of stereotypes has increased, male domination has not been substantially reduced in recent publications (Durrani 2008; Lee and Collins 2009, 2010a; Mirza 2004; Mukundan and Nimehchisalem 2008). Particularly, Ullah and Skelton (2013), employed a qualitative content analysis to examine gender representations in 24 textbooks used in public schools in Pakistan and established that female characters were underrepresented in both narratives and iconography. Female negligibility was related to the gender of the authors, reviewers, editors, and supervisors of the textbooks (Ullah and Skelton 2013). This unbalanced distribution of male and female characters may predispose children to deem females as less significant than males (McCabe et al. 2011).

Manifestations of male dominance have also been observed in relation to gender roles in the family. Specifically, females are frequently portrayed in a demarcated domestic sphere as caretakers, housewives, and mothers (Durrani 2008; Gooden and Gooden 2001; Hamid et al. 2008; Jin et al. 2013; Mineshima 2008; Mustapha 2012; Lee and Collins 2009, 2010a; Skelton 1997; Ullah and Skelton 2013; Yasin et al. 2012). While femininity in textbooks is commonly associated with activities such as cooking, nurturing children, and buying household goods, masculinity is 'rarely, if ever, identified with such activities' (Abraham

1989, 40). Male characters, instead, are breadwinners bestowed with power and authority (Lee and Collins 2009, 2010b; Mineshima 2008; Mustapha 2012; Ullah and Skelton 2013; Yasin et al. 2012).

Textbooks and children's literature also reinforce gender divisions in the labour market; for instance, in the 'social definition of tasks' into either "men's work" or "women's work" and the ascription of certain 'kinds of work as more masculine than others' (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1987, 94). Lee and Collins (2009) postulated that Australian textbooks fail to deconstruct patriarchy, and despite recent gender-equalizing developments, male characters outnumbered females 3:1 and were depicted in the labour market twice as often as females. When females were portrayed in the public domain, they were restricted to a limited number of professional roles, predominantly teachers, actresses, designers, and nurses (Durrani 2008; Gouvias and Alexopoulos 2018; Lee and Collins 2009; Ullah and Skelton 2013; Yasin et al. 2012). 'These traditional "gender roles" are presented as simply an extension of women's caring, nurturing and mothering placed in the public domain (of teaching and nursing)' (Ullah and Skelton 2013, 188).

Male characters, however, occupied a wide range of professions, from low-ranking jobs such as farmers and firemen to high-ranking careers such as doctors, politicians, and judges (Abraham 1989; Hamdan 2010; Lee and Collins 2009; Tang, Chen, and Zhang 2010; Ullah and Skelton 2013). A recent study conducted by Lee and Collins (2010b) used content analysis to compare gender representations in English language textbooks from Australia and Hong Kong. Their findings revealed that male characters were 'still confined to their traditionally "male" roles, ranging from the lower-status roles of farmer, soldier, hunter and miner, to the higher-status roles of pilot, politician, inventor and marine commander' (Lee and Collins 2010b, 128).

Gender Representation in the Hellenic Textbooks of Primary Education.

Asymmetry in patterns of gender representation in Hellenic textbooks is similar. Particularly in reading schemes published in the periods of 1843 to 1919 and 1954 to 1979, female characters have been underrepresented and strictly positioned in the domestic setting as housewives (Makrinioti 1986; Lalagiani 1999). Ideological axes of schoolbooks published between 1983 and 2006 did not significantly depart from this paradigm. Notwithstanding women's shifting locus in Hellenic society, narratives and iconography of schoolbooks have remained androcentric (Kantartzi 1991; Meselidis 2009).

Despite a recent major revision of Hellenic textbooks in 2006, portrayals of male and female characters therein have not significantly changed. Male characters continue to dominate narratives and iconography in reading schemes for the fifth and sixth grades (Maragoudaki 2007). In contrast to an expansion of males' positioning within the current public sphere, male characters still occupy traditionally masculine professions while females remain consigned to a limited number of traditionally feminine occupations such as teachers and nurses (Maragoudaki 2007). Gouvias and Alexopoulos (2018) explored reading schemes using content analysis for the third and fourth grades, and argued that not only were female characters underrepresented, but also that '...the two genders, as far as specific roles, skills and abilities are concerned, in the family, professional and social spheres' (Gouvias and Alexopoulos 2018, 657) remained traditional, with women relegated to peripheral, low-status occupations.

A review of international and Hellenic literature demonstrates that school manuals reinforce anachronistic gender roles and, unsurprisingly, femininity and masculinity are discursively constructed in a dualistic framework. 'A dualistic relation is one in which the subordinate term is negated, rather than the two sides being in equal balance' (Paechter 2006, 256). Within this framework, femininity is constructed as 'a variety of negations of the

masculine' (Paechter 2006, 256). In methodological parallel, most previous studies, especially those in Hellas, were harnessed to content analysis and structuralist approaches to gender. Such research was thereby limited to unsophisticated exegeses on the impact of the textbooks' gendered representations on pupils' perceptions of gender. Davies (1989) contends, however, that children negotiate gender discourses in subjective ways and that the effects of gender-normative representations on their understanding of gender cannot be presumed.

The Polysemy of Narratives: Children as Active Producers of Meanings.

Poststructuralist theorists' emphasis on subjectivity, discourse, and the plurality of narratives has fuelled a body of feminist research on education that scrutinizes pupils' role in the production of meanings (Davies 1989; Kostas 2018; Trousdale 1995; Westland 1993; Yeoman 1999). These studies purport that children are critical readers who do not simply credulously absorb the gender discourses they are presented with (Davies 1989; Kostas 2018); rather, several parameters can influence the way in which children negotiate gender discourses (Davies 1989; Kostas 2018).

First, studies have shown that boys are less prepared than girls to disrupt normative representations of masculinity and femininity (Davies 1989; Kostas 2018). Westland's (1993, 244) study on British children's responses to the Cinderella story revealed that unlike girls, who preferred autonomous heroines, boys '... had little incentive to alter the standard fairy-tale structure.' Davies (2006) argues that boys actively engage in 'category maintenance work' when characters challenge the gender order in order to recreate the binary and hierarchical gender relations. This 'border-work' involves the process of 'abjection', which refers to the practice of rejecting the other as 'a way of establishing the I' (Davies 2006, 73). By 'abjecting the weak, the dependent, and the feminine', boys in Davies' (2006, 73) study established 'the coherence and legitimacy of the dominant male'. In addition, a strong

synergy has been observed between pupils' aptitude to subvert gender discourses and their mother's professional status (Davies 1989; Kostas 2018). Specifically, Kostas (2018, 537) argued that:

Boys with mothers in paid employment, in particular, reproduced to a greater extent non-traditional gender discourses than those whose mothers did not actively participate in the labour market. This positive relationship was even stronger when the mother held a position which gave her agency or authority.

Finally, as Yeoman (1999) demonstrated in her study of Canadian fourth- and fifth-grade pupils' responses to non-normative gender discourses, the degree of prior exposure to egalitarian gender discourses influenced children's understanding of gender, as they viewed stories through a filter based on prior knowledge (intertextual knowledge) of other stories and their quotidian experiences. 'Intertextual knowledge refers to the use of previously known texts to make sense of new ones and to give coherence to lived experience' (Yeoman 1999, 427). As such, exposing children to egalitarian representations of gender over a sustained period of time may have a positive, gender-equalizing impact (Trepanier-Street and Romatowski 1999).

The Poststructuralist Theorisation of Gender and the Hierarchical Scales Governing Gender Performances.

The poststructuralist theorization of gender as performative in nature and repudiation of the inherent stability of gender as merely an illusion (Butler 1990) led to its reconceptualization as 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being' (Butler 1990, 45). In short, gender is relational, and is constituted through discourses. Discourses are 'historically specific organizations of language' (Butler 1990, 145) and consist of 'competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes... [and] they

offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity' (Weedon 1987, 35).

Discourses are vehemently enmeshed in the exercise of power and are produced and perpetuated through institutional practices, which, in turn, normalize and regulate these practices (Georgaca and Avdi, 2012). This "mutualistic relationship" is symptomatic of the "discursive entanglement" between discourses and institutions. Within the institution of schooling, quotidian practices contribute to the reproduction of 'hegemonic ideologies such as gender and patriarchy, which are embodied in the curricula in both the formal and hidden forms' (Gramsci 1994). Textbooks, as crucial elements of official educational content and strategies (Brugeilles and Cromer 2009), form the basis of many of these practices. Through the poststructuralist lens of discourse, textbooks are viewed as 'socio-political' and cultural products 'and as discourse, as fora wherein ideologies, social relations and power are discursively constructed, negotiated and effected' (Philippou 2012, 430), influencing how readers are located within discourse (Brugeilles and Cromer, 2009).

Although textbooks, as discursive bodies, have the potential to thwart traditional gender hierarchies and disrupt dominant discourses, a plethora of studies have postulated that school manuals represent a "propagative mechanism" of hegemonic gender ideologies (Tsao 2008), predisposing young readers to accept traditional gender relations (McCabe et al. 2011). For example, according to Temple (2005, 281), texts 'dichotomize heterosexuality and homosexuality, setting the stage to see sexuality in terms of opposites of normal and abnormal', which epitomizes the "syndesmosis" of successful masculinity and femininity with heterosexuality. Thus, in the textbooks gender performances are firmly positioned within a "heterosexual matrix". It The 'heterosexual matrix' describes 'the grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized' and are 'hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality' (Butler 1990, 151). The amalgamation of masculinity and femininity with heterosexuality begets regulatory

gender performances, for heterosexual practices constitute an idealized form of sexual orientation that extends beyond sexual expression to traditional wedding ceremonies (romantic heterosexuality) and the nuclear family. Within the heterosexual matrix, androphilia and gynephilia are epitomized as the most natural and valued forms of sexuality.

In patriarchal, hierarchical scales of power and domination, an individual's gender performances are placed at different levels on the hierarchy. Hegemonic masculinity is at the top (Connell 1995) and denotes a socially idealized form of masculinity, or 'what it means to be a man' (Hanke 1990, 232). This venerated form of masculinity functions within a topography of supposed common sense and orthodox morality and legitimizes masculine performances via subordination and pathologisation of femininity and non-normative performances of masculinity (Renold 2001). This socially exalted form of masculinity is not inherently hegemonic, but maintains ascendancy through force, control, '...culture, institutions and persuasion' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). Specific characteristics around which hegemonic masculinity is constructed depend upon sociocultural and historical location. Although Connell (1995) is taciturn in providing a meticulous description of the qualities of hegemonic masculinity, numerous studies have postulated that in Western societies, hegemonic masculinity encompasses sexual domination, aggression, determination, unemotionality (Seidler 2006), and heterosexuality (McDowell 2003). In both domestic and public spheres, hegemonic masculinity upholds patriarchal hierarchical gender structures, which perpetuate women's subjugation in the social system (Kostas 2014).

Conversely, emphasized femininity is placed at the bottom of the hierarchy; this category of femininity 'is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented toward accommodating the interests and desires of men' (Connell 1987, 184-5). Though it 'is very public...its content is specifically linked with the private realm of the home and the bedroom' (Connell 1987, 187). Specifically, emphasized femininity epitomizes females'

dependency on men, as well as their passivity, conviviality, lack of technical competence, and maternity (Connell 1987). Emphasized femininity manifests itself through females' positioning as nurturers and housewives in the domestic sphere, and as pariahs in the public domain (Kostas 2014).

Methods

This study was situated within a poststructuralist paradigm and employed a qualitative methodology for analysing the discursive content of anthology textbooks of the third and fourth grades, and children's responses to the gender-normative discourses contained therein. The textbook analysis is of superseding importance, as in the centralized Hellenic education system textbook content is supervised by the Ministry of Education and the teaching thereof is mandated across all private and state primary schools. The Anthologies are compendiums of contemporary literary works (novels, poems, etc.) encompassing a broad selection of themes (environment, wellbeing and sporting, family life, culture, religion, technology, history, and science fiction).

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (Lazar, 2007) was used for discursive construction analysis of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity in the narratives. The objective of FCDA is 'to examine how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or [counter]resisted in a variety of ways through textual representations of gendered social practices...' (Lazar 2007, 149). Main themes encompassed characters' roles and responsibilities in family life and the public realm. Additionally, quantitative content analysis was used to analyse the distribution of female and male characters and protagonists in the narratives and iconography, as well as the genders of the authors. Each title was coded as including a feminine name or pronoun, a masculine name or pronoun, both, non-identifiable, or neither. Protagonists' and minor characters' genders were determined through the storyline and were coded as female, male, non-identifiable, or neither. Considerations also included

whether the characters were humans or animals, and if human, whether children or adults. However, this study reports on the findings of adult characters' roles only.

For analysing how children negotiated the gender discourses promoted in the textbooks, semi-structured group interviews were conducted in two mixed-gender, average-sized Athenian elementary schools. Semi-structured interviews were considered to be a suitable data collection method as they offered children the flexibility to develop on themes of interest and allowed 'depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses' (Hitchcock and Hughes 1989, 83). The two schools were situated in socioeconomically similar areas. School A was located in central Athens and consisted of 6 classes (141 students in total) while school B was situated at the outskirts and consisted of 8 classes (189 students in total). Both schools were characterized by ethnic homogeneity and their catchment areas served mainly white, middle-class families. Logistical concerns dictated my decision to conduct group interviews, as they enable the collection of large amounts of data in a time-efficient manner (Lankshear 1993). Additionally, group interviews with children often generate richer data than one-to-one interviews, as children tend to extend one another's views and feel less intimidated by the presence of the researcher, which allows for a freer expression than talking individually to an adult (Lewis 1992). Furthermore, this type of interviewing encourages interaction among participants, offering them the opportunity to reflect on their views (Kitzinger 1994) while their 'responses to one another's comments may well prevent the routinised responses by one child sometimes obtained in individual interviews' (Lewis 1992, 417).

To enable more free-flowing discussion, participants were allocated into interview groups with the help of the teachers, taking into consideration interpersonal relationships. Altogether, 80 eight- to ten-year-old pupils (40 boys and 40 girls) took part in the study. In both schools, 20 mixed-gender group interviews were held, with each group consisting of two

girls and two boys (eight group interviews in school A and 12 group interviews in school B).

A considerable advantage of mixed-gender group interviews is that the presence of the members of the opposite sex in the group can stimulate discussion, minimize acting out behaviours and make the group more task-oriented (Spruyt-Metz 1999). Additionally, this type of interviewing enables the researcher to explore participants' views 'as they operate within a social network, and to explore how accounts are constructed, expressed, censured, opposed and changed through social interaction' (Kitzinger 1994, 159). During the interviews, I made sure that participants felt comfortable and that boys' and girls' views were challenged in a respectful way that encouraged debate, ensuring that dominant voices in the groups did not override the voices of other participants (especially the girls' voices).

During the interviews we discussed male and female characters' roles in the family and labour market¹. The interviews were recorded by note-taking so as to preclude ethical issues surrounding audio recordings of minors². Comprehensive notes of significant discussions were developed into full transcripts at the end of each day. Prior to gaining access to schools, ethical clearance was sought from the Hellenic Ministry of education, and the British Educational Research Association's (2011) ethical guidelines of informed consent, no harm, confidentiality, anonymity, and right to withdraw were followed throughout the research process.

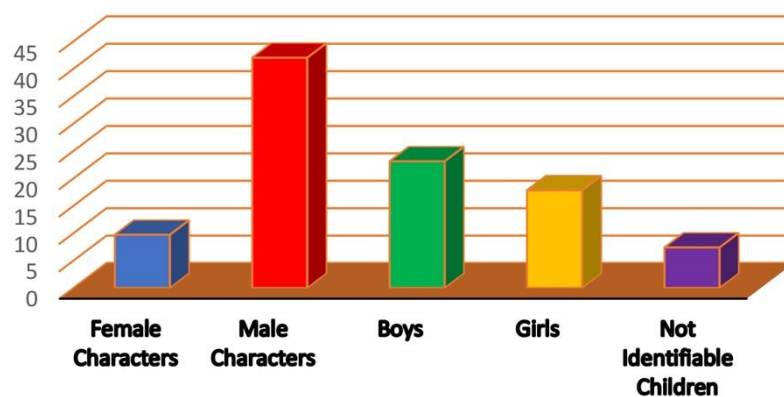
Findings

The Symbolic Obliteration of Females in School Textbooks.

Quantitative analyses revealed that females were underrepresented in the textbooks. The numeric male domination correlated to the gender of story authors (58 percent males and 42 percent females) as well as gender distribution in the titles. In particular, approximately half of the stories contained no males or female in the titles (51 percent). In gender-specific titles

(49 percent), males outnumbered females by approximately 4:1 (29 percent males and 8 percent females).

Analyses of the distribution of male and female protagonists and minor characters in the narratives yielded similar findings. The data illustrate that male characters outnumbered females 3:1. Specifically, of the 192 characters recorded, 137 were males (70.8 percent), 54 were females (27 percent), and 4 were non-gender specific characters (0.8 percent). This asymmetry was reflected in the distribution of female and male protagonists, wherein female central characters were outnumbered 2:1 (68 percent male and 32 percent female). Similar gender asymmetry was also noted in the iconography (Figure 1).



The numeric imbalance in favour of male characters in the narratives and iconography reflects an ostracism of females from cultural products - in this case, textbooks - and their symbolic obliteration. This disproportionate ratio of males to females obliquely cultivates the idea that women are less important than men, and upholds hegemonic masculinity discourses. These findings corroborate previous studies suggesting male numeric domination in the textbooks of primary education in Hellas (Maragoudaki 2007; Gouvias and Alexopoulos 2018) as well as internationally (Durrani 2008; Lee and Collins 2009, 2010a; Mirza, 2004; Ullah and Skelton 2013).

Gender Roles in the Domestic Sphere

The analysis of power relations and gender roles in the discursive space of the home asserted a family life systematized within patriarchal structures. In narratives, femininity is identified with motherhood and females are discursively positioned predominantly as housewives and mothers. Typical examples are the portrayals of Kostaina who ‘...was preparing pancakes...’ (Anthologies, 64) and Argyris’s mother who ‘...kneaded the dough...’ and ‘...made sweet bread...’ (Anthologies, 72), as well as Zakigia ‘...when she was not cooking, she was sewing festive dresses for herself and her daughter...’ (Anthologies, 154). These reductionist representations, which present the home as women’s natural place, fail to deconstruct patriarchy, normalize women’s subjugation in society, and predispose children to accept emphasized femininity discourses of female domestication.

Females’ discursive positioning in the private domain also epitomizes women’s nurturing role, as narratives overemphasized maternal devotion and affection. From little Harris’s mother who helps him to ‘... wear his coat ...’ and ‘... put on his shoes...’ (Anthologies, 89) to Catherine’s mother who ‘...makes the bed...’ and helps her daughter ‘get dressed’ (Anthologies, 132), women’s (and especially mothers’) positioning in the domestic sphere venerates the female’s caring nature. Even in the zoological realm, mothers are positioned as loving and caring towards their children. A typical example is Asproulis’s mother, a deer, who ‘... licked her son’s bleeding wound softly, with affection and tenderness’ (Anthologies, 37). The underlying message of these discourses of motherhood and female domesticity, around which emphasized femininity is constructed (Connell 1987), is that females’ bodies preordain them to a demarcated domestic sphere, wherein the woman is solely responsible for cooking and nurturing her children.

Diametrically opposed to the mother is the father/husband, identified as the breadwinner. This positioning of the father propagates the patriarchal paradox of the

symbolically present but substantively absent father figure, for he is stationed predominantly in the public sphere, working arduously to provide the means for survival of his family. This bestows the father with his discursive construction as a symbolic figure of authority. For instance, in the story 'The Mouse and his Daughter,' the father is enthusiastically looking for a husband for his beautiful daughter. In this narrative, not only is matrimony idealized, but femininity and masculinity are strictly positioned within a heterosexual matrix. Throughout the story, the daughter is passive and dependent, while her father - who makes decisions on her behalf - is discursively constructed as a figure of power and authority (Anthologies, 50). Similarly, in *The Little Beam* (Anthologies, 19) and *The Little Sunbeam* (Anthologies, 10) paternal consent is requested for significant life decisions.

These narratives reinforce the spatial binary of public/private spheres and normalize the gendered dualism of the female homemaker/male breadwinner to legitimize women's subjugation in society. Within the context of the nuclear family, while the father/husband is portrayed as the protector/provider, mothers/wives are inherently identified with domesticity and depicted as dependent upon men. The dearth of representations of paternal affection towards the children or spouse sustains hegemonic masculinity discourses of male unemotionality (Seidler 2006). The only exception is Aris' father who, upon realizing the seriousness of his son's condition, '*...began to cry like a child...*' (Anthologies, 135). This discursive positioning of the father challenges hegemonic masculinity discourses, which promote the idea that men don't cry. This representation is unlikely to deconstruct the patriarchal system, however, for arrays of power in the anthologies reinforce patriarchal privilege bestowed upon fatherhood along with patriarchal strength.

The discursive construction of fatherhood in the studied anthologies normalizes males' symbolic power in the family and exalts male hegemony, emphasizing childcare as a fundamentally, and often entirely, female activity. Although the lasting strength and intimacy

of the mother-child attachment is accentuated in the narratives, men's parental relationships are devalued and repudiated in order to maintain a patriarchal construct of masculinity, which delineates males' ontological dissimilarities from females and substantiates the father's supremacy in family and society. In the domestic sphere, the father and mother are asymmetrically positioned within the binary typologies of absent/present, powerful/powerless and unaffectionate/affectionate. As noted by Ullah and Skelton (2013, 188) 'textbooks give a clear message that women have a subsidiary status in society, [and] their only appropriate and legitimate role is to perform the household tasks of nurturing and caring for the family'. Additionally, the textbooks reinforce a heteronormative understanding of the world, as the family model is restricted to the heterosexual matrix. Within this matrix, androphilia and gynephilia are idealized and presented as natural, predisposing children not to question existing social relations. The narratives reinforce emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity discourses, which regularize the fathers' and mothers' normative discursive positioning in the realm of the home and normalize a nuclear patriarchal family organization. These findings align with previous research suggesting that textbooks reinforce patriarchal structures of family organization (Durrani 2008; Hamid et al. 2008; Jin et al 2013; Maragoudaki 2007; Meselidis 2009; Mineshima 2008; Mustapha 2012; Lee and Collins 2009, 2010a; Ullah and Skelton 2013; Yasin et al. 2012).

Gender Roles in the Public Sphere

In the narratives, the discursive space of the public domain is portrayed as a male bastion of patriarchal privilege wherein female characters are positioned as social pariahs in peripheral, low-status occupations. In particular, quantitative analysis demonstrated that within the characters³ depicted in the workforce, comprised of 63 males and 4 females, male characters occupied a broader range of professional roles than females (30 and 4, respectively), which is symptomatic of a symbolic ostracism of females from the public realm. These findings align

with those reported by Gouvias and Alexopoulos (2018) of the reading schemes for third grade. Specifically, the authors noted that in the textbooks female characters were condemned to the status of pariah in the labour market, for ‘male persons were linked to 224 occupations, whereas female ones to only 35 occupations’ (Gouvias and Alexopoulos 2018, 651). Additionally, analyses of female characters’ occupational roles revealed that married women were largely excluded from the workforce, and single women in paid employment were assigned low-prestige, manual occupations (florist, verger). There was not a single case of a female scientist and the only intellectual role permitted, for women, was that of the teacher. The findings echoed those of previous studies which have shown that female characters’ occupational roles in the discursive topography of the public domain are presented as a natural extension of women’s nurturing roles (Ullah and Skelton 2013), for they are consigned to a limited number of traditionally feminine occupations, predominantly teachers, dancers and nurses or low-status jobs such a cleaning lady, cook and hairdresser (Durrani 2008; Gouvias and Alexopoulos 2018; Lee and Collins 2009; Ullah and Skelton 2013; Yasin et al. 2012).

In the narratives, the demarcated domestic sphere was presented as females’ natural place, and women’s discursive removal from it was only justified by their responsibilities as housewives (e.g., shopping). Similar to the findings of previous studies (Durrani 2008; Gouvias and Alexopoulos 2018; Hamdan 2010; Lee and Collins 2009; Meselidis 2009; Tang, Chen, and Zhang 2010; Ullah and Skelton 2013; Yasin et al. 2012), male characters were depicted in the public realm more frequently and were assigned roles that carried authority and power, as in public service (mayor or army officer), high social standing professions (doctor, dentist, or journalist), occupations requiring technical skills (astronaut, captain, scientist, or artist), or manual, physically demanding jobs (farmer, miller, baker, butcher, locksmith, or athlete).

Overall, the narratives reinforced the gendered dualism of the male breadwinner/female homemaker, with the labour market off-limits to mothers. These discursive representations predispose children to accept gender-normative discourses, which normalize males' superior physical and intellectual capabilities and relegate women to low-status, traditionally female occupations. Anachronistically, this discursive positioning of females and males in the public domain fails to emulate women's position in contemporary Hellenic society. These findings are also in keeping with those found in previous Hellenic and international research (e.g. Gouvias and Alexopoulos 2018; Maragoudaki 2007; Meselidis 2009; Lee and Collins 2009; Ullah and Skelton 2013).

Children as Active Producers of Meanings: Subversion and Reproduction.

An analysis of pupils' accounts of gender roles in the domestic setting yielded some crucial gender asymmetries with regards to boys' and girls' sense-making of gender-normative discourses. Predominantly, while most third- and fourth-grade girls (17 third-grade and 16 fourth-grade girls) subverted dominant perceptions of femininity concerning females' roles in the family, most boys (18 third-grade and 16 fourth-grade boys) reproduced the polarized gender binaries that governed the discursive structures of family organization. Typical to this are Manos', Medea's and Maria's responses:

Interviewer: Should uncle Kostas help his wife with cooking?

Manos: 'Men cannot cook'

Maria: 'Yes, he should help her'.

Interviewer: Can they learn?

Manos: yes...they can learn to make easy things'

Interviewer: 'Who is going to do the washing up after dinner?'

Manos: 'Aunt Kostaina...'

Interviewer: 'Why?'

Manos: 'because uncle Kostas doesn't know...and he is tired because he was working in the mill'

Medea: 'because aunt Kostaina cooked, Uncle Kostas should do the washing up'

Interviewer: Aunt Kostaina doesn't work in the mill?

Manos: 'No, she doesn't...because it's very hard'

Maria: 'maybe she does...'

Boys engaged in 'category maintenance work' by drawing on hegemonic masculinity discourses, which reinforce the gendered dualism of the female homemaker/male breadwinner 'to take up their own identities in meaningful and predictable ways within a known order' (Davies 2006, 72). Their views are in line with the discursive representations of masculinity and femininity in the Hellenic textbooks of primary education, which reinforce the identification of femininity with domesticity (Maragoudaki 2007). It can be argued that these boys were bereft of intertextual knowledge of stories that disrupt the dominant gender division of household chores, which may partially explain why they maintained gender binaries and upheld a formidable notion of masculinity and the empowerment entailed therein. Girls, on the other hand, 'welcomed' men into the traditional feminine topography of the 'kitchen' and transgressed and deconstructed emphasized femininity discourses, such as the identification of cooking and cleaning as solely feminine activities. Girls' 'abjection' (Davies 2006) of normative notions of femininity upended gender order and served to distance them from emphasized femininity and 'the disempowerment that comes with it' (Paechter 2006, 257).

Analogous gender asymmetries were noted in relation to girls' and boys' responses to characters' discursive positioning in the labour market. Specifically, third- and fourth-grade boys almost unanimously (19 third-grade and 19-fourth-grade boys) reproduced the discourses of female domesticity, which uphold males' hegemonic position in the public sphere. Typical to this are Manos' and Theodore's responses:

Interviewer: 'Does aunt Kostaina work in the mill?'

Manos: 'No, it's a difficult job.'

Manos: 'No, uncle Kostas works in the mill...it's very hard job for her'

Interviewer: 'Isn't it a tiring job for men?'

Manos: 'Men get tired too, but women get tired more easily'.

Theodore: 'Women can work... occasionally they work, but men make more money....

Men don't stay at home'.

Interviewer: Why?

Theodore: '...because men are strong and must work'.

Theodore and Manos reproduced the polarized construction of femininity and masculinity regulated by the gendered binary of the weak female/strong male and normalized the discursive gendered dualism of the female homemaker/male breadwinner. Comparably, the majority of third- and fourth-grade boys (19 third-grade and 19-fourth-grade boys) construed the discursive topography of the mill as a male-dominated domain from which females are excluded, due to lack of physical strength. In parallel with this, female employment was undervalued and was perceived merely as supplementing male labour supply. However, unlike the rest of the boys, Achilles and Costas thwarted hegemonic masculinity discourses and challenged females' normative positioning in the domestic sphere.

Achilles: 'Women can work. My mother works'...if they want they can do what men do'

Achilles' and Costas' 'abjection' (Davies 2006) of inherent female domesticity may stem from the fact that they have the discursive history to do so, for both boys have mothers who are gainfully employed. The findings illustrate that boys can filter stories based on their quotidian experiences of gender. Unlike Achilles, many of the third- and fourth-grade boys were growing up with stay-at-home mothers, and their lack of knowledge of and experience with working women seems to have facilitated their acceptance of normative gender roles. This synergy between the employment status of the mother and the student's capability to subvert normative notions of femininity and masculinity has been suggested by several studies. In particular, it appears to be even stronger when the mother holds a position of authority (Davies 1989; Kostas 2018). It is important to note, however, as Davies (1989, 63)

argues, that ‘it would be a mistake to think of this relation as a causal one. If it were, the solution to all of our problems would simply be to have all women go out to work’. The findings illustrate that narratives are polysemous sites (Lemish 1998) and readers’ understanding of a text is based on the meanings they already possess (Yeoman 1999). Nevertheless, for the majority of the third-and fourth-grade boys who did not have the intertextual knowledge to disrupt conventional storylines about gender, these discursive representations of masculinity and femininity validate their preconceived spatial binary of public/private spheres, reproduce the patriarchal gender system and legitimize women’s subjugation in society. The inclusion of a curriculum that challenges traditional gender narratives, offering young readers intertextual knowledge of disruptive stories, may be beneficial in encouraging young readers to upend anachronistic gender discourses. Girls almost unanimously (18 third-grade and 17 fourth grade girls) contested the discursive marginalization of females in the labour market, disrupted the gendered dualism of the female homemaker/male breadwinner, and in a display of discursive agency, “re-positioned” women in the public sphere.

Maria: ‘I think that aunt Kostaina works in the mill too’

Although ‘girls’ subversions and transgressions are nearly always contained within, and rarely challenge existing structures’ (Reay 2001, 164), the girls in my study challenged the discursive phantasmagorias of female domesticity and male hegemony, which in textbook discourses were predicated upon women’s subordination in the social cosmos. Their responses also highlight the nexus between children’s discursive agency and mother’s employment status, for most of the girls’ mothers were employed outside the home. Maria’s mother held a high-position job at a newspaper, which may have provided a discursive foundation for her daughter to challenge women’s positioning solely as domestic beings. Of interest, the data revealed that overall, the boys’ mothers’ education level was lower than the

girls' mothers' education level, which in conjunction with their lack of previous exposure to gender-egalitarian discourses, may somewhat explain why the boys appeared more averse than the girls to participating in a disruption of normative discourses.

Girls took on contradictory discursive positions; although they almost unanimously challenged the discourses of female domesticity, they supported to the same extent as boys a gender-normative division of occupations. This was notable in pupils' responses when asked to list three gender-appropriate professions each for males and females. Both boys and girls relegated females predominantly to low-status jobs (hairdresser, cleaning lady, or cook) or artistic occupations (singer or dancer). A few pupils (1 third-grade and 1 fourth-grade boy and 2 third-grade and 3 fourth-grade girls), however, mentioned higher-ranking, skilled professions (lawyer or pharmacist). In contrast, males were assigned manual and physically-demanding occupations (builder, craftsman, footballer, or basketball player) as well as highly-skilled professions (doctor, surgeon, or engineer) and positions of authority (policeman). To a great extent, students reproduced the polarized division of the labour market discursively constructed in the anthologies, which may be symptomatic of the role of textbooks in crystallizing hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity discourses in pupils' perceptions of gender-appropriate roles.

Furthermore, the girls' and boys' accounts of the scene where Aris' father '*...began to cry like a child...*' (Anthologies, 135) upon realizing the seriousness of his son's health problem revealed that most pupils drew on localized and dominant discourses and failed to challenge the gendered binarism of female sensitivity/male unemotionality.

Interviewer: 'What do you think about this Aris' father crying?'

Tassos: 'I don't know...men do not cry...he is a woman'

Nana: 'girls and women cry...'

Remarkably, Tassos' perception of successful masculinity was constricted by broad, culturally idealized, hegemonic masculinity discourses that emphasize male unemotionality. By drawing on the heterosexual matrix, Tassos questioned the protagonist's heterosexual identity. Similarly to Tassos, most boys (16 third-grade boys and 17 fourth-grade boys) ascribed to dominant notions of masculinity and perceived crying and other emotional expressions as a signifier of non-normative masculinity, synonymous with weakness. The discourse of male unemotionality prodigiously regulated most boys' understanding of masculinity, as 'crying' can 'call a boy's gender and [hetero]sexual identity into question' (Renold 2005, 75). The boys' 'abjection' (Davies 2006) of an emotional male forms part of their engagement in 'category maintenance work' (Davies 2006, 73), in which they 'abject the "other", cast it out from the self...in attempts to signal: "this is what I am not"'. Through these processes, boys safeguarded their masculinity, and through reproduction of the gendered dualism of female emotionality/male unemotionality, they delineated the boundaries of successful masculinity and its superior position over subordinated femininity within the requisite heterosexual matrix.

However, a few third-and fourth-grade pupils (4 third-grade boys and 2 third-grade girls and 3 fourth-grade boys and 4 fourth-grade girls) acted agentially and questioned the dualism of the emotional female/unemotional male.

Medea: 'Yes, but don't shed tears'.

Athena: '... men cry...but not as much as women'.

Cleopatra: 'Yes they do...not less often than women'.

Achilles: 'Yes...men cry when they are sad'

Although Medea and Athena challenged culturally idealized notions of femininity, they did not thwart gender norms, for they maintained the polarized dualistic construction of

masculinity and femininity. Conversely, Cleopatra and Achilles subverted the apparent inevitability of this dualistic framework and the gendered binarism of emotional/unemotional.

The pupils' responses suggest that texts are 'polysemous sites' (Currie, 1999) and that boys and girls can demonstrate different degrees of agency. Girls were more likely to reject normative notions of femininity, as found in previous studies which suggested that boys are less likely to subvert gender hegemony (Davies 1989; Kostas 2018; Westland 1993), theoretically because they have more to lose by defying the traditional gender order. This is symptomatic of the manner in which hegemonic masculinity operates, as it regulates those within its confines and marginalizes those outside of it, which become the 'other' against which masculinity defines itself. Girls, by resisting emphasized femininity discourses, empowered themselves (Paechter 2006).

Discussion

The analysis of Hellenic anthology textbooks demonstrated that, notwithstanding some positive developments (e.g., a large number of gender-neutral titles) femininity and masculinity remain discursively positioned within a dualistic framework (Paechter 2006).

The narratives reinforce a division of society into separate and distinct private and public spheres, relegating the former to females and the latter to males. Particularly in the discursive topography of the home, an idealized form of masculinity is epitomized through men's positioning as breadwinners and figures of authority. Within a dualistic framework, the idealized form of femininity is identified with motherhood and homemaking activities such as cooking and cleaning. The patriarchal nuclear family structure firmly ensconced within the heterosexual matrix phenomenally make unimaginable the possibility of the mere existence of non-heteronormative identities.

Although textbooks could play a crucial role in eliminating gender stereotypes by offering more egalitarian gender representations in their narratives, current anthologies fail to

deconstruct patriarchy. Official educational policy for teaching materials does not appear to have sufficiently embraced measures for promoting gender equality. As they stand, these anthologies predispose children to accept anachronistic gender roles and contribute to the reproduction of gender inequalities and the maintenance of a patriarchal gender system. Government officials and textbook authors need to become more sensitized to the significance of the gender messages promoted through the curriculum material.

Analyses of pupils' responses, however, did demonstrate that children are agentic and can negotiate gender-normative discourses in idiosyncratic ways. Although most of the girls, and a few boys to a certain extent, subverted the normalizing and regulatory gendered discourses promoted throughout the anthologies, most of the boys engaged in 'category maintenance work' (Davies 2006, 72) and rejected non-normative positionings of femininity, hypothetically because they endangered the male supremacy inherent to the traditional gender order. The findings indicate that children's discursive agency varies according to gender, as girls seemed generally more willing than boys to subvert normative notions of gender roles, possibly because of the empowerment gained by distancing oneself from emphasized femininity (Paechter 2006). The findings of this study yielded a plausible synergy between parents' education level, and particularly the mothers' professional status, and children's ability to resist normative notions of masculinity and femininity. It is important to affirm, however, that children's sense-making of the texts is also influenced by the way in which educators treat gender-normative representations in the classroom. As a result, further research on teachers' practices and their role in subverting or reinforcing gendered discourses propagated through the curriculum material would be an important complement to this study.

Notes

¹ The discussion was based on the stories: Nordin in the Church p.72, Prasinoskoufis p.64, The Garden of Samich p.154, Katerina and the Invisible Man in the Dark, p.132.

² The Hellenic Ministry of Education did not allow me to use a tape recorder during the interviews to ensure children's anonymity and confidentiality.

³ Only 54% of male and female characters portrayed in the labour market (46.3% males and 7.2% females).

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